

**Interview of Harriet Wise on her service in the Women's Army Corps  
during WWII and in Asia following the war**

5Female 1: [00:09] [inaudible] ...for the Lansing Unit of the Women's Overseas Service  
6 League on April 20, 1983. Harriet Wise will give us a resume of her experiences  
7 overseas with the Army, uh, Army...

9Female 2: [00:18] ...Women's Army Corps.

11Female 1: Women's Army Corps.

13Harriet Wise: In 1942, I was working with the National Youth Administration in Cleveland,  
14 Ohio. I came back to Lansing for Thanksgiving vacation and many of my friends  
15 said to me, "We thought you'd be in the WAC now." When I went back, I gave it  
16 thought and I knew that National Youth Administration would soon be gone. So I  
17 went downtown and enlisted, and was called to service, uh, the 25<sup>th</sup> of January  
18 1943. On the, um, 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1943, I went to the Officer's Candidate School at  
19 Fort Des Moines, Iowa. It was the 26<sup>th</sup> class. From there, I was sent to Fort  
20 Devens and worked in company work. Um, I didn't particularly like this type of  
21 work, so I thought I'd ask for Finance, which was my, uh, background work. And,  
22 I got orders to the Army Exchange Service School at Princeton University in New  
23 Jersey. Was I ever surprised! Uh, there was only, uh, 6 women in a class of 42.  
24 Um, this was a very interesting experience. From there, I was sent back to, um,  
25 Des Moines in exchan-, er, in, uh, company work and then I went to Fitzsimmons  
26 General Hospital in Denver, Colorado as an Assistant Exchange Officer.

28 After 2 years there, I went to, uh, Fort Knox, Kentucky as Company Commander.  
29 And then I decided that I didn't know whether I'd stay in any longer – that I'd get  
30 out. I went down to Washington to, uh, look into about getting a job in  
31 Washington and I ran into a WAC officer and she asked me if I would like to go  
32 to Japan. I said, "As a WAC?" and she said yes. I said, "Well, that's the only way  
33 I'll ever get there, sure!" She said, "Wait in my office until I come back." I waited  
34 for her and when she came back, she said, "You're going to Japan." General  
35 MacArthur had just asked for a large number of WACs.

37 Um, I went over on the Admiral Sims. Um, I was Commanding Officer then of  
38 102 enlisted women going over. When, uh, we got there, we all went our different  
39 ways and I went to, uh, Yokohama as Assistant Exchange Officer. A short time  
40 later, I was given my own post exchange in the dependent housing area, which  
41 included bowling alleys, beauty parlors and barber shops, and laundry. Uh, it was  
42 a very, uh, interesting experience, and I learned to know the Japanese and to like  
43 them.

1 Um, when my orders came in 19-, uh, 49, they were for ships com-, uh, New  
2 York Port of Embarkation, Brooklyn, New York. When I arrived in there, my  
3 assignment was the U.S.A. [inaudible 3:55], which was an assistan-, uh, was a  
4 transport ship and I was Assistant to the Transport Commander. This consisted of,  
5 uh, taking care of the dependents – seating the dining room and assigning quarters  
6 and problems during the sh-, uh, the voyages. I made, uh, 9 trips to Germany. Uh,  
7 then I, uh, was returned to, uh, United States and was assigned work at the New  
8 York Port and, um, then I, uh, got orders again for, um, Japan and I was sent as  
9 the X-Officer to Tokyo, Japan. That was 1951.

10  
11 Uh, there, I was with the Central Purchasing Office, which bought, uh,  
12 merchandise from the foreign countries around there for all exchanges and, uh, we  
13 had a store there and I managed that store. I took a leave in 1953 to Hong Kong,  
14 China, Bangkok, and Thailand. Uh, and there, I did, uh, some buying for the store,  
15 meeting many of the merchants. While I was there, I was able to assist some, um,  
16 I was, uh, penning contact with officers and some of the men of the USS  
17 Kearsarge, which was an aircraft carrier, and I helped them in buying things for  
18 their families back home. I was asked, with a friend of mine, to have dinner on the  
19 USS Kearsarge and this was a really thrilling experience because, while there,  
20 they had some of the planes take off to show me how they took off and landed. It  
21 was really, uh, a very thrilling experience.

22  
23 Back to the United States, I was stationed at Fort Devens as an Exchange Officer  
24 and, uh, then, that was in '55 and in '57, I went to Fort Douglas – Salt Lake City,  
25 Utah – as Post Exchange Officer. I enjoyed that beautiful part of the United  
26 States. And then I returned to, uh, Fort McCull-, McClellan, Alabama and was  
27 Chief of the Enlisted Branch and all the-, Postal Officer; then, eventually, was  
28 C.O. of the (head and 6:53] headquarters company. This was an experience I  
29 enjoyed, and we all had to give our time to, uh, the training, uh, centers. Then I  
30 had orders in 19-, in 1960 to Korea. I was Assistant PX Officer in Seoul, Korea. I  
31 had a very interesting experience there. That was the only place that I ever heard  
32 any gunfire. That was when Pot took over Korea and the firing was right around  
33 us and we were told, called – given a call and told to get down on the floor until it  
34 quit.

35  
36 Um, then I left, uh, Korea and returned to the United States in June of '61 and was  
37 assigned to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana as PX Officer. This was my last  
38 assignment and, there, I retired after 20 years in the service.

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41Female 2: [8:08] What were the things that thrilled you overseas?

42  
43Harriet Wise: Well, I would, uh, I've always been a person that liked to travel and to, uh, see  
44 different places and, every time I had a chance, I would, uh, get out. Of course,

1 most of the traveling was done, uh, by Jeep and, uh, sometimes it was a little  
2 rough. Um, for the most part, we didn't have to be afraid of the natives, but they  
3 were hard up and they would steal. And so you had to watch your personal  
4 belongings.  
5  
6Female 2: [8:45] In Japan?  
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8Harriet Wise: Mm-hm. But, um...  
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10Female 2: [8:50] I didn't find that at all true in 1949.  
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12Harriet Wise: You didn't? Mm-hm.  
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14Female 2: [8:54] In fact, they would run a block to return [inaudible 8:56] to me.  
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16Harriet Wise: Hm. Well, this was more or less in the country fields, I mean, that we'd have  
17 something like that. I never found it...  
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19Female 2: [9:04] [inaudible]  
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21Harriet Wise: Yeah, mm-hm. I never foned, uh-, found this in the cities, but, uh...  
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23Female 2: [9:10] [inaudible]  
24  
25Harriet Wise: But uh, I had it [inaudible 9:12] – no, it's right beside me in the Jeep and it's, uh,  
26 my camera was right beside me in the Jeep and somebody [laughter] came up and  
27 grabbed it and I couldn't catch 'em. Um, but one of the things I did enjoy in Japan  
28 – when I lived in Tokyo, I lived in a hotel that was occupied by all, uh,  
29 Americans, and I could call down at the office at night and ask for a masseuse and  
30 the price would be less than a dollar in Japanese money. And she'd come up and,  
31 for an hour or an hour and a half, she would be so, oh, just so good and how I  
32 enjoyed that after a long hard day on my feet. [laughter]  
33  
34Female 2: [9:58] Um, in what hotel did you stay in Tokyo? Uh, ca-, do you remember? Was  
35 it the [Okeitu 10:03] or the [Osaka 10:04]?  
36  
37Harriet Wise: Uh, when I, uh, first went into Japan, I had a very antagonistic feeling toward the  
38 Japanese, 'cause I'd lost somebody very dear and, uh, then I had this dependent  
39 PX and had around 100 and – over 150 Japanese working for me, plus my own  
40 help at my quarters. And, when I left there, I was homesick for Japan and the  
41 people. For a couple days on the ship, there were tears in my eyes. This was  
42 something new to me. I had been away from sch-, from home to school and had  
43 never been homesick before. So, the Japanese evidently got to me. They were  
44 very sweet people.

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2Female 2: [11:04] What was Tokyo like during the years you were there?  
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4Harriet Wise: Well, alls I remember it as, it was a, just a large city, peaceful. I remember, uh,  
5 going to the, uh, palace grounds at one time when, I can't remember now though  
6 whether it was the emperor's birthday or what it is, but it was something of that  
7 sort that they were celebrating and, uh, there was a huge crowd there. They had,  
8 uh, uh, we were all very welcome, but they all thought so much of their emperor  
9 and worshipped him. I don't, um, I had very little free time, outside of army  
10 activities, that, um, except for traveling and seeing things, I didn't go to, uh, many  
11 Japanese activities or anything like that. I don't know, if in those days whether we  
12 were really welcome or not, but I didn't go to anything like that.  
13  
14Female 2: [12:18] And that's it?  
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16Harriet Wise: Mm-hm.  
17  
18Female 1: [12:26] Thank you, Harriet. Harriet Wise may be located at 1226 North Fairview,  
19 Lansing, MI 48912. Her phone number, the area code is 517, and her phone  
20 number 371-1102. We enjoyed your experiences in Japan, Harriet.  
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